

Pizza From A Non-Kosher Establishment - Concurring Opinion

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Rabbi Aaron Alexander

I want to begin by offering Rabbi Paul Plotkin a well-deserved thank you. The food industry grows more complex by the day and his ability to navigate its dynamism alongside vast swaths of complicated *halakhah* is remarkable. He has provided each of us with the tools to understand and apply reasonable standards to a core Jewish obligation, kosher eating.

Rabbi Plotkin's approach is also unique. There is often a tendency in the observant kosher world to use the *halakhic* system to prohibit that which ought be permitted. He authentically approaches our sources with full knowledge of how complicated it can be to utilize them globally and objectively. By writing that, "*We will explore all pertinent halakhic issues with the express desire to see how we can legitimately eat a slice of pizza from a non-kosher pizzeria,*" he distinguishes himself as a posek and scholar.

While I voted affirmatively on this paper, there is one particular place in which I think we disagree. Rabbi Plotkin acknowledges in the beginning of his *teshuvah* that there exists within our movement a robust tapestry of individual observance,¹ and yet communal standards deserve distinct attention. He clearly states that, "*Whether at the synagogue level including the many arms of the synagogue, and their youth programs, or their regional and national organizations, the professional bodies and of course the seminaries, Camps Ramah and Schechter day schools; all our institutions set the bar for their followers. Since their practices will be emulated, they must always fully observe halakhic rulings.*"

I agree that events held by major Conservative Movement Institutions (seminaries, USCJ, RA, WL, FJMC, etc..) *ought* to use this paper as a guide. When official institutions and/or multiple communities collaborate on a sponsored event, there is value (though I admit not the only value at play) in maintaining a standard with which all should be comfortable.

However, while I support a position that legislates reasonable standards for major institutional bodies and official cross-communal movement events, I am hesitant to impose *only* this solution on individual rabbis and their communities (all events at the synagogue level for which the Mara D'atra is responsible for determining communal practice). I see my function on the CJLS as someone who can help clergy/Jews determine the boundaries of permissible and forbidden, with depth and rigor, but simultaneously allow for the

1 Rabbi Plotkin's quotation of the "Ladder of Holiness" authored by Rabbi Paul Drazen (The Observant Life, 336,7) is an example of this.

possibility that any colleague could come to a different conclusion/solution for her individual community. While I like Rabbi Plotkin's methodology and analysis of the texts and industry, I do not want this approach to necessarily negate other possible avenues to kosher non-*hekhshered* food (i.e., pizza, for this particular responsum). Moreover, I do not want to usurp the authority of any individual *Mara D'atra* for her community. I see that as beyond the limits of my own authority as a member of the CJLS.